Calling all students

Surprise schools begin new academic year Aug. 6

By Rusty Bradshaw

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Bells will be ringing in Surprise next week, but it will not be for Christmas. It will be the bells calling students back to school.

Classes throughout Dysart Unified School District will begin Wednesday, Aug. 6. Students will have a chance to meet their teachers and visit their schools during a series of “Meet Your Teacher” sessions scheduled in the days leading up to that first day. Rancho Gabriella will lead off the elementary school sessions Friday, Aug. 1. Sessions at Ashton Ranch, Canton Ridge, Cimarron Springs, El Mirage, Kingswood, Marley Park, Luke, Mountain View, Parkview, Riverview, Sonoron Heights, Sunset Hills, Surprise, Thompson Ranch, Western Peaks and Countryside at slated for Monday, Aug. 4; while sessions for Dysart, Sundown Mountain and West Point are Tuesday, Aug. 5.

The district’s four high schools — Shadow Ridge, Willow Canyon, Valley Vista and Dysart — will conduct open houses Monday, Aug. 4.

District officials project enrollment of 25,886 for the 2014-15 fiscal year, according to Polly Corsino, district spokeswoman. Registration at all schools continues during specific school office hours, she added.

“Beginning this week, we are back to a Monday-Friday schedule,” Ms. Corsino stated in an email.

District officials also sent last week email notices to parents that the most recent AIMS scores have been posted. District and school scores are available on the Arizona Department of Education website, www.azed.gov. DUSD officials are no longer mailing student scores to parents. Those results can be picked up at each child’s school.

While students will be getting back into the swing of classroom life again, parents and other district residents will be formulating their decision about future school funding. The district governing board voted in June to attempt a tax override election during the Nov. 4 general election. The measure will seek an extension of the override first approved by voters in 2000 and last renewed in 2010.
If the $18.1 million override is not extended this year, district officials will have to cut a third of that amount from the maintenance and operations budget for the 2015-16 school year.

“It will mean some very tough times if we don’t pass the override,” said Jack Eaton, district executive director of business services. “We have made $50 million in cuts over the last five years. There is nowhere else to cut.”

The majority of M&O funds pay personnel.

“What we’re talking about here is people,” Mr. Eaton said. “This override funds 360 staff members.”

Tax overrides allow public school districts to collect an additional 15 percent of its state funding. Dysart’s override in the 2013-14 school year is $18.1 million.

When originally approved, tax overrides are for a period of seven years. If not renewed, it begins to phase out in the sixth year by one-third and another one-third in the seventh year. There is no override in the eighth year. DUSD is entering the fifth year of the existing override extension.

Before the passage of the May 2000 override, the arts programs, physical education and band were cut from the district budget due to lack of funding, according to information in the “Achiever,” a district publication sent to residents. However, they were restored when voters approved the override.

Mr. Eaton emphasized that extending the override will not add anything to residents’ tax bills.

“It is simply keeping in place what is already there,” he said.

The override funds specific areas in the M&O budget. They include art, music, band, physical education, athletics, all-day kindergarten, resources for grades K-3 and staff to help maintain low-class sizes.

“That is the only areas override money will go because that is what we promised voters when it passed originally,” Mr. Eaton said.

District staff and governing board members cannot campaign for the passage of funding measures, they are limited only to providing factual information. District officials will work closely with resident groups in support of them, according to Gail Pletnik, Ed. D., district superintendent. However, such a group had not been established by the end of last week.

District officials attempted to pass an $86.6 million bond last November to fund capital construction and maintenance. The Governing Board chose to deal with that issue another time instead of putting it on the same ballot with an override request.

Helpful district websites

Dysart Curriculum and Standards www.dysart.org/iplan Dysart Gifted Program www.dysart.org/gifted

News Editor Rusty Bradshaw can be reached at 623-445-2725 or rbradshaw@newszap.com.